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ABSTRACT

In a recent survey of 200 college freshmen, 97% said they learn best by listening. Electronics and technology are excellent instructional supplements, but when they become the means of instruction, the instructors lose heart in relationship listening. Research indicates that "perceived caring" on the part of the students in regard to the instructor enhances the students' attitudes toward the class and their perception of what they learn. The considerations of the classroom setting or context for relationship listening include: (1) lighting (so students can see the instructor); (2) distance/space ("personal space" for students); (3) levels (lecture classroom should be on a single level); (4) axis (directional relationships of instructor/students and student/students); and (5) artifacts (furniture, Projection screens and podiums should not clutter teaching space). and objects). The greatest advantage that a dynamic instructor in the classroom has over all other instructional media and methods is human interaction and reciprocal caring expressed through relationship listening. (Contains five notes; a sample interview survey is appended.) (CR)

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Reciprocal Listening with and from the Heart in The Electronic Classroom

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On college campuses, at least at Northwest Missouri State University, emphasis in classroom instruction is electronic: PC plug-ins on each student station (no longer called desks) for interaction and immediate access to the internet, video supplement for classroom projection and distance learning, computer power-point projection and modular learning. These appear to be the answer to the "boring instructor" providing "uninteresting" material. But electronics and technology discourage student/instructor's person to person communication and "Socratic" interaction. The main purpose for a knowledgeable and caring instructor is diminished. Yet in a recent survey of 200 freshmen, 97% said they learn best by listening. University professors become technology facilitators rather than experts who care and verbally interact with students.

Electronics and technology are excellent instructional supplements, but when they become the means of instruction, we the instructors lose heart in relationship listening. The argument for the electronic classroom to replace the lecture classroom is that the students are "bored". Professors devote 80% of the class period lecturing. In a recent survey on the question "why do you not listen to learn in the classroom?" 89% replied "the instructor is "boring", and the messenger is "uninteresting". (Bohlken 1996) But the "student/instructor relationship listening" is more important than "flashing lights and novel sounds" in maintaining student interest, especially in general studies' courses where the students' purposes are not clear.

Research indicates that "perceived caring" on the part the students in regard to the instructor enhances the students' attitudes toward the class and their perception of what they learn. Consideration of the electronic classroom and teaching /learning process is important in creating an environment which promotes relationship (empathetic) or heart listening, a meaningful factor in "perceived caring."

Dating back to Aristotle, "perceived caring" has been an important factor in presentational communication. Aristotle included "good will" (perceived caring) as one of the three factors of Ethos (source credibility.)

McCrosky[1] (1992) determined that "perceived caring" is the central perception of the teacher by the students. (McCrosky (1992) contends that the three factors of "perceived caring" are the student perceived instructor's 1) "understanding student perspective," 2) "empathy" and 3) "responsiveness.") A significant aspect of these three factors is listening especially in regard to "responsiveness." To support this observation, I surveyed 250 college Freshmen. Seventy-six percent of those surveyed stated that they were motivated to listen and learn by their relationship with the instructor. They stated reciprocal listening is a definite factor in their motivation. (Bohlken, 1993)

Having established that "perceived caring" especially relationship or empathetic listening is a significant factor in student classroom attitudes and perceived learning effectiveness, we turn to classroom characteristics that enhance or detract from "relationship or 'heart' listening." Specifically we will

consider the electronic classroom containing power point and video capabilities, 40 student interactive computer stations, overhead projection, teacher control station and podium, but material presented is applicable to any classroom or conference center room such as this. The considerations of the classroom setting or context for relationship listening include 1) lighting, 2) distance/space, 3) levels, 4) axis, and 5) artifacts (furniture and objects).

The student/instructor abilities to see one another's eyes, facial expressions and gestures or body demeanor or movement is essential in public/relationship listening and reciprocal trust; therefore appropriate and adequate lighting sufficient to see the visual nuances of the classroom communicators. As we just demonstrated through the use of computer - driven power point, we had very little personal interaction or mutual relationship listening. Hickson & Stack[ii] have verified the obvious in that eye behavior, facial expressions, gestures and body movement are important factors in establishing mutual credibility. A darkened room defeats the purpose of relationship listening and the human element of the classroom. Total focus on visual displays has short-lived-attention maintenance and removes the human element from the classroom. The dynamics of the instructor need to be shared and "shadowed" by the students. The need for light in effective listening is essential. (Demonstrate)

Closely related to a well-lighted classroom is one in which space and distance among or between students and instructor are given consideration. First consider the students' personal space within the classroom. Personal space defined by Hall[iii] (1966) to be beyond 18 inches is important because of

"other student created distraction." In our survey of students, "other students" ranked right along with "temperature" as the most distracting classroom physical element. Each student station (needs to be 24 inches circumference) to provide appropriate space and to avoid extensive distraction from other students. Depending on levels the instructor should maintain a minimum of 36 inches from the students on the front rows of the classroom. This distance is also influenced convenient eye contact and reference. There is a direct relationship among distance, level, and eye contact. If the instructor is standing in front of students seated at consistent floor level four to six feet if appropriate. The maximum distance between student and instructor is thirty feet. Beyond this distance students report less involvement with instructor, less listening and the instructor being boring. The instructor perceive the back row students as "indifferent," "don't care," and "sleepy looking." At this distance audible and visual nuances are significantly less noticeable and nonverbal elements of interaction diminished. (Bohlken 1996)

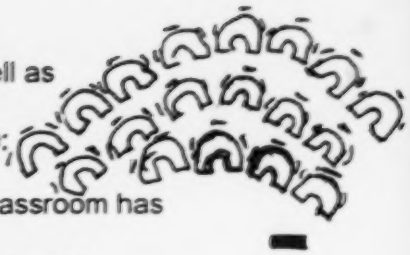
Another variable in communication with "heart" and relationship listening is "level." The common lecture classroom is single level with instructor standing. This level arrangement indicates the instructor's dominance as the major speaker and the students as the listeners. This dominance is diminished somewhat by the instructor periodically sitting on a high stool or having a slightly raked classroom of three tiers of platforms rising one foot above each other. The top tier of seated students should provide direct eye contact level with the standing instructor. Naturally, if the purpose for the instruction is team effort or group

discussion the same seated level is appropriate but impractical with a tiered classroom.

Axis (the directional relationships of the communicators) is important in two aspects: 1) instructor/students 2) student/students. Axis may best be visualized on a clock face. One communicator is at 12 and the other communicator may be at nine, three, six, two, etc. Our study of classroom behavior indicates that the instructor "attends" students seated to his/her left at 3 o'clock. Eighty percent of the instructors observed paid significantly more attention to students seated at their left in the second and third rows and least attention to back row to their right. To compensate for this phenomenon the teacher station should be located to the student left of center. This way proximity alleviates the eye contact attention. Axis also plays a role in student interaction and relationship listening. An educational trend is student "team" effort. To facilitate team interaction and relationship listening among a three member team are the axis of 12, 10 and 2.

Artifacts (furniture, projection screens, podiums, etc.) play a role in relationship listening. Students attend instructors who are dynamic, open and predictable; therefore, teaching space needs to be free from artifacts. The equipment console should be to rear left of the instructor. Projection and video screens should be rear center. One tall stool on wheels should be in the lecturing area. Student stations with their computer connections must be stationary but seats should swivel. An inverted U-shaped table or desk appears

to be most satisfactory for both teacher/student interaction as well as student/team interaction. The room configuration would look like:



The greatest advantage that a dynamic instructor in the classroom has over all other instructional media and methods is human interaction and reciprocal caring expressed through "relationship listening". Both students and instructors should utilize and develop this skill in order to enhance learning. We need to aware that electronic technology is supplemental and not a substitute for the instructor who cares and listens to his/her students. Through adapting the electronic classroom on the basis of lighting, distances, levels, axises, and artifacts, the important element of relationship listening in the classroom will remain.

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2. J.C. McCroskey. An Introduction to Communication in the Classroom. Edina, Minnisota:Burgess.
3. Mark Hickson and Don Stacks. Nonverbal Communication Studies and Application. (Wm. C. Brown 1995) 212.
4. Edward T. Hall. The Hidden Dimension. (New York:Doubleday, 1966).
5. Bob Bohlken unpublished manuscript Northwest Missouri State University 1996

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Interview/survey of College Students in regard to classroom Lecture Listening in general studies courses.

1. What classroom characteristic do you think distracts your listening most during a class lecture (temperature, wall color, light, etc.) and why?

2. What personal characteristic of your own, most often interferes with your class lecture listening ability (tired, hungry, worry, daydreaming, can't hear, etc.)?

3. What characteristic of a teacher interferes most with your listening to a class lecture (appearance, voice, speech rate, vocabulary, etc)?

4. What do you think the listener's attention span is while listening to college classroom lectures?

5. What characteristic of an instructor causes you to listen effectively?

6. When you listen well to a lecture, how do you respond (eye contact, head nod, note taking)?

7. When you listen to comprehend, do you take notes? How do you take notes (complete, outline, paraphrase)?

8. Do you think where you sit in a classroom influences your listening? Where do you sit and why?

9. In the class you listen best, why do you listen? (to pass a test, to learn new information, to please the teacher, interest in the topic, etc.)

10. In the class lectures you listen best, do you ask the instructor questions?

11. How does the topic or subject of the lecture influence the effectiveness of your classroom listening?

12. How does time influence your effective listening to a classroom lecture?

13. How does the classroom lecturer's caring or "attending" you influence your listening effectiveness?

14. What single factor influences your listening to a classroom lecture most? (lecturer, yourself, the topic, the environment)